THE WORLD'S MASTERS

CÉZANNE

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THE WORLD'S MASTERS

PAUL CÉZANNE

1839—1906

1929
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4. VELAZQUEZ.
5. EL GRECO.
6. CÉZANNE.

In preparation :

7. DAUMIER.
8. GOYA.

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Biographical Notes.—Paul Cézanne was born at Aix on 19th January, 1839. His father was a hatter who subsequently became a banker. Cézanne was educated at the Collège Bourbon where he took his *bachelier ès lettres*. He was put to the law but soon quitted it for the Aix Museum Art School where Joseph Gilbert was master. He then went to the Free Swiss Academy in Paris. The remainder of his life was spent mostly at Aix or in the neighbourhood, with occasional periods in Paris and a tour of Belgium to study Rubens. In 1867 he married Marie Hortense Fiquet. He died on 22nd October, 1906.

Many of the works of Cézanne are in private collections in all parts of the world. Examples are also at the Louvre; the Luxembourg; the National Gallery of Modern Art, Millbank; Berlin and Moscow.

Books dealing with the work of Cézanne include: Théodore Duret, *Les Peintres Impressionnistes*; Emile Bernard, *Souvenir sur Paul Cézanne*; Octave Mirbeau et Théodore Duret, *Cézanne*; Gustave Coquiot, *Cézanne*; Ambroise Vollard, *Paul Cézanne*; Joachim Gasquet, *Cézanne*; Élie Faure, *Paul Cézanne*; Roger Fry, *Cézanne*; Tristran-L. Klingsor (translated by J. B. Manson), *Cézanne*.

DID ever a painter's reputation pass so quickly through such violent changes of estimation as Cézanne's? He was an Impressionist and all Impressionists were damned. One or two madmen gave a hundred francs for his daubs. He was a minor Impressionist and all Impressionists were respectable. Collectors and dealers gave a thousand francs for his works to make up their sets. He was not an Impressionist at all: he was the herald of the new era: he was a God. Buyers vied with each other to give fantastic prices for his masterpieces and painters to father on to him every eccentricity in which they indulged. "If the greatest name in European painting," said Mr. Clive Bell, in 1920, "is not Cézanne it is Giotto." There was no alternative.

And now what has happened? Fickle fashion is getting tired of Cézanne. Of course he is a great artist and all that, but really to

quote him frequently is to show signs of age ; besides he has become a monument. There are the claims of Alma Tadema to be considered. . . . I was surprised to discover the other day what a monument Cézanne has become. Questioned as to what I thought of modern art by an elderly archæologist who lives in the country, I began of course very mildly with Picasso and Matisse.

" No, no," said my archæologist, " I don't mean them. They're established masters of course. I mean So-and-so and So-and-so."

If Matisse and Picasso are no longer debatable in the opinion of an elderly archæologist, where indeed is Cézanne ? In the Museums I suppose.

What it all means of course is that Cézanne is taking up his proper place. It is no longer necessary to burn incense before him and gaze

upon his lightest sketch with cow-like fidelity : it is merely outlandish to abuse him. We can write critically of Cézanne now : we can treat him with as little respect as we treat Rembrandt, Rubens or Titian. We can recognise that like most great painters he completely fulfilled only one thing, that like them he had his faults and his limitations, and that however profound his influence he does not sweep away the whole of Christian art since Giotto.

I am not concerned here with his influence : that his name has been invoked by almost every vital movement since his death is sufficient evidence of that, though how far he would have approved is another and much more debatable question. I am concerned simply with his achievement. What did he *do* ?

He brought volume back into painting : he picked up the thread of the great tradition that

had been frayed by Velazquez and finally ignored by the Impressionists and their immediate forerunners, particularly Turner. The method of rendering appearances, the passing effects of light with its modification of local colour which Velazquez discovered but never allowed to replace the essential structure of form, gradually became a fetish. In Turner's late work structure as a three-dimensional idea disappeared altogether: his pictures became flat patterns of colour and tone. Even contour disappeared. The Impressionists carried the business to its extreme, and by their scientific researches into the nature of colour they achieved the highest possible degree of brilliance, variety and truth to momentary appearances. The rendering of the effects of light had entirely replaced the rendering of volume.

At first Cézanne belonged to the Impressionist group; he was greatly influenced by Pissarro in particular. But although he gained

from them a feeling for clear, luminous colour he was dissatisfied with the sacrifice of volume which their creed seemed to demand. He set himself a new problem. He was far too genuine an artist to be content with archaism ; he would not reinstate volume by the old methods. What Impressionism had taught must somehow be applied : a synthesis must be discovered.

His association with the Impressionists had trained him to look at colour rather than outline. He could not therefore happily adopt the school method of drawing. But he realised that colour could be considered not for its own sake but for its function in the expression of volume, that he could draw with colour. He realised that we perceive form not as an outline first drawn and then coloured in, but as a series of distinct planes, each subtly different from the rest in colour but all harmoniously related. He realised finally that in

the passionate and exclusive study of colour as it appears at any given moment, the lasting sense of local colour is lost, but that on the contrary, local colour must be retained if the massive and enduring quality of great art was to be achieved.

He set himself then the appalling problem of resolving these demands, of utilising colour to express volume, of stating the accidental interplay of colour and light without losing the average—or local—colour of the objects.

His problem then was a purely æsthetic one; he had no interest in the subject as such; still less in psychological, literary or associative qualities. He wished passionately to render what he saw, but in terms which should reconcile the atmospheric with the architectural vision.

The result was that Cézanne found himself

out of touch with his age, which either looked back to the stereotyped drawing of the art schools or forward to a more and more scientific concentration on light. He was fortunate however in possessing the two things which were vital if he was to bear up—money and self-confidence. He retired further and further from men, becoming surlier, lonelier, more misanthropic as the years went by ; and when recognition did come it was too late.

But his self-confidence carried him through —self-confidence not in his ability, but in the rightness of his aim. He *knew* he was right : and he was determined to express himself perfectly in the mode he believed in. Such a perfection was impossible, but even Cézanne's approximation is little short of miraculous. Every brush stroke had to be considered in its placing, its colour and its tone, so that it should fulfil several complexly inter-related functions : its part in the definition of the specific volume

to which it belonged : its part in the whole rhythm of volumes : its part in the rich and varied colour system. Sometimes he found the difficulty so great that he abandoned the attempt lest one small touch should damage the harmony already built up. So we find in certain pictures little patches of bare canvas. These are not part of his method as so many of his followers seem to think ; they are the evidences of the failure of his powers to come up to his ideals—a state of affairs common to all men. They are also the evidences of his admission of that failure—a state of affairs extremely uncommon among men.

His self-confidence then involved a great humility. He believed in his vision but he mistrusted his hand. He was perhaps the most conscientious artist that ever lived ; and, with the possible exception of Velazquez, perhaps the most single-minded.

ANTHONY BERTRAM.

PLATE I
SELF PORTRAIT

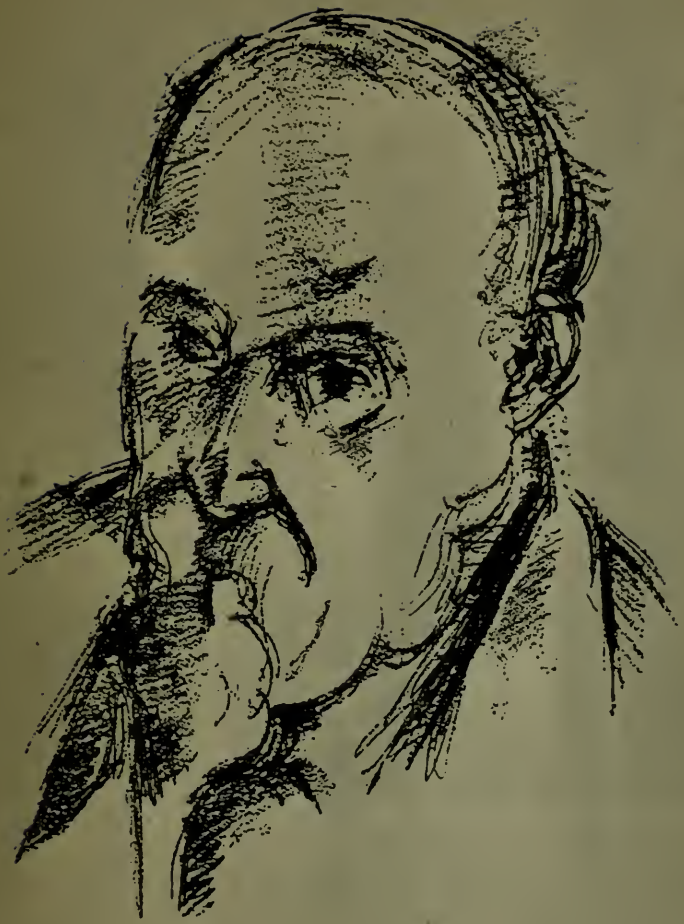

PLATE II
SELF PORTRAIT

PLATE III

MME. CÉZANNE IN THE CONSERVATORY

PLATE IV
PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

PLATE V
THE SMOKER

PLATE VI
STUDY OF A MAN

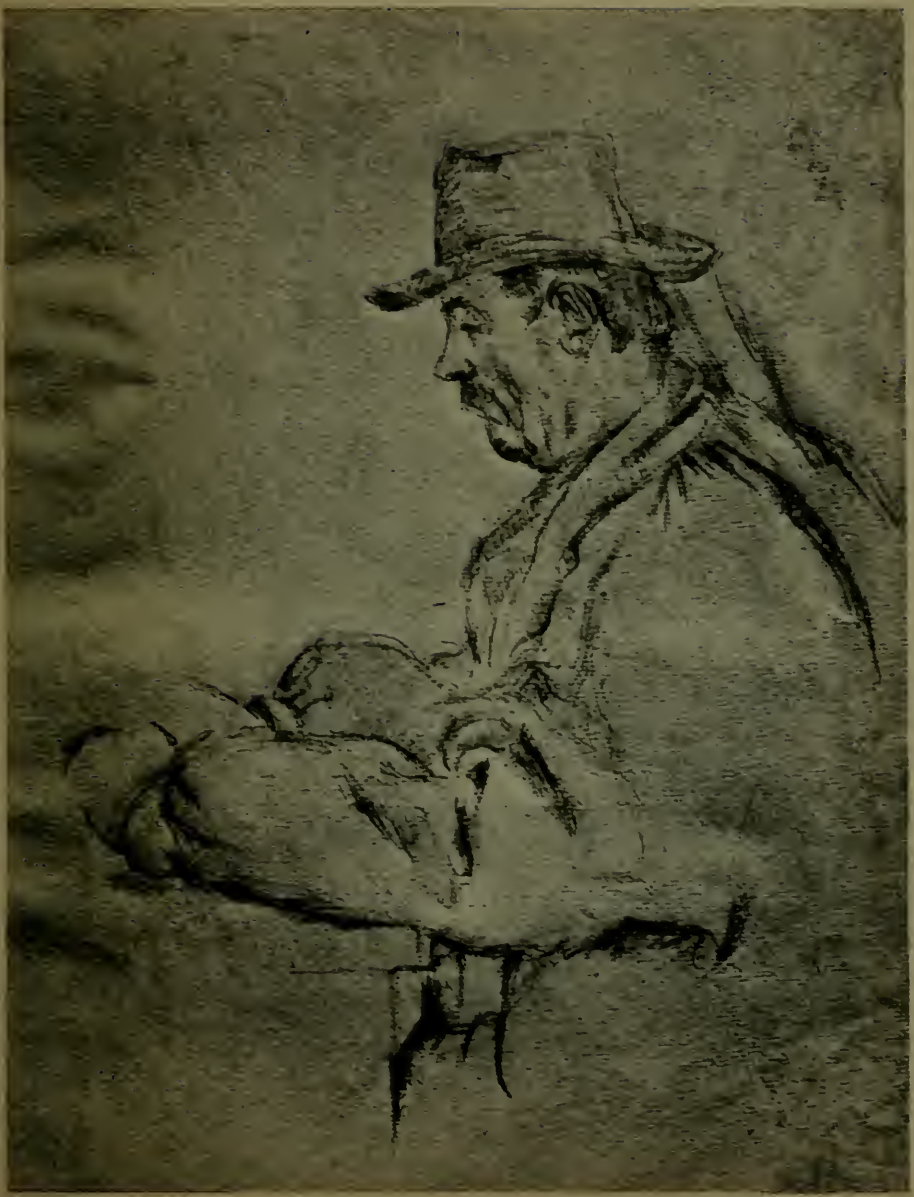

PLATE VII

THE CARD PLAYERS

PLATE VIII
THE BOY WITH THE SKULL

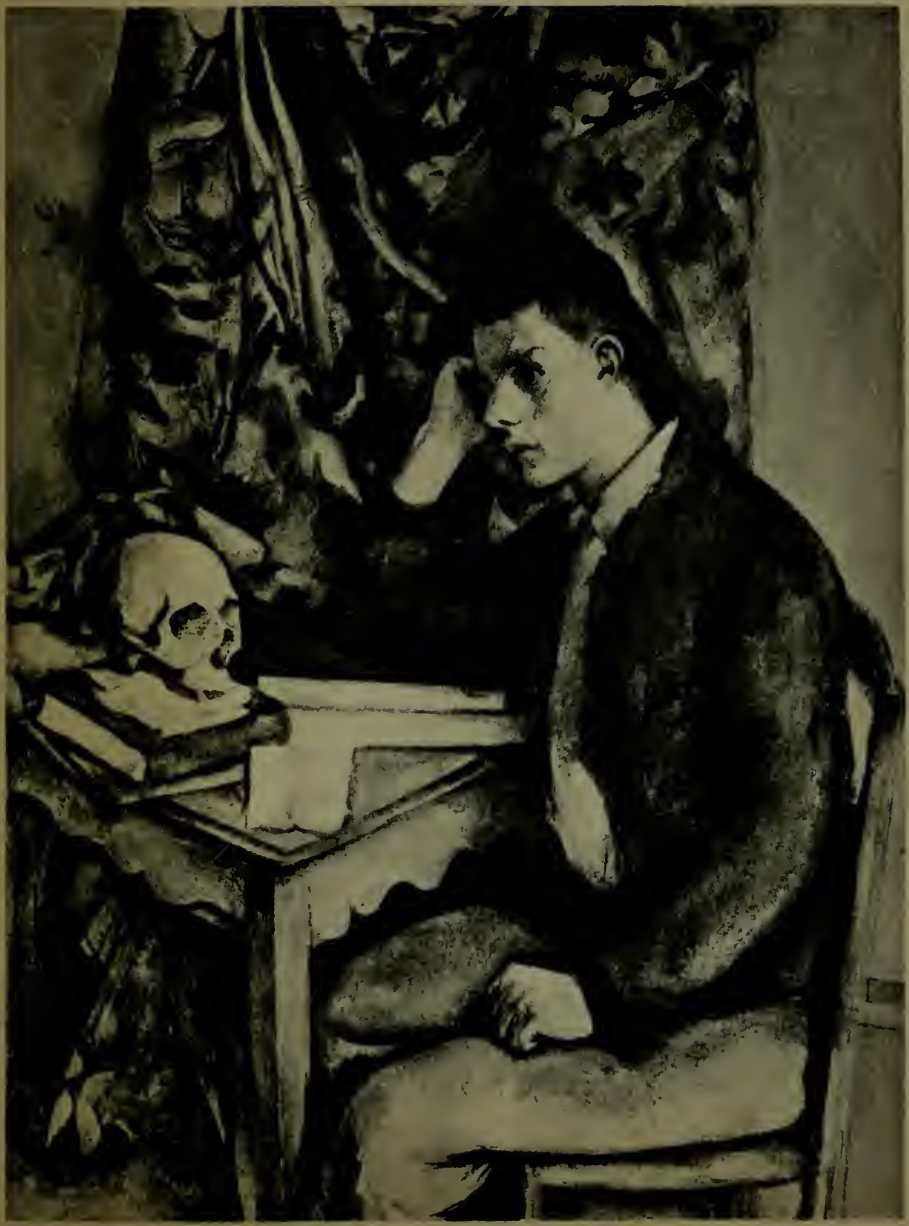

PLATE IX
MARDI GRAS

PLATE X
BATHERS

PLATE XI
BATHERS

PLATE XII

LA MAISON DU PENDU

PLATE XIII

THE BUTCHER'S HOUSE, PONTOISE

PLATE XIV

LE JAS DE BOUFFAN

PLATE XV

LE JAS DE BOUFFAN

PLATE XVI
LANDSCAPE

PLATE XVII
L'ESTAQUE

PLATE XVIII
FORÊT DE CHANTILLY

PLATE XIX
TULIPS

PLATE XX
APPLES AND ORANGES

PLATE XXI
STILL LIFE

PLATE XXII

THE APPLE BASKET

P. Cézanne

PLATE XXIII
STILL LIFE

PLATE XXIV

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